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ABSTRACT

As the numbers of children enrolled in child care from infancy have increased, there is a growing acceptance of this now prevailing mode of childrearing. Asserting that the "necessary evil" perception of child care contributes to the mediocrity of the American child care system, this book contends that this characterization is misguided and unfair for children raised in high-quality child care centers. Attempting to discredit this perception and clarify the value of providing high-quality child care, the book presents the child care stories of children attending the Oxford Street Daycare Cooperative, a high-quality program in Cambridge, Massachusetts serving 50 children ages 4 months to 5 years. Children's and families' experiences in the Baby Room and the Preschool Room were documented in several ways, including daily observational notes, video recordings, and photography. The two major stories revolve around infant's growing fascination with music and musical instruments, describing a series of concerts in the Baby Room, and children's interest in drawing wild cats, describing how the work of 4- and 5-year-olds took on the feel of a collective research project. Included are glimpses into the Toddler and Stomper rooms at the center and excerpts of interviews with former students and their parents. Interspersed in the stories and in greater detail in the concluding chapter are interpretations about the nature, meaning, and implications of children's child care experiences. The book emphasizes that the values of membership in the group and having a close relationship with a teacher contribute to the conclusion that rather than a necessary evil, growing up in child care can be a gift. The book's three appendices describe the Oxford Street Daycare Cooperative, the Baby Room, and the Preschool Room. Each chapter contains notes, listed at the end of the book. (KB)

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